

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Pelican drive scoops more capacity

To appreciate the capacity of the latest floppy drives, consider this: The standard capacity for floppy disks is 360 kilobytes — enough space to store about 80 articles this size. It sounds like a lot, but is really puny for business needs.

For this reason, most businesses also have hard disks with much higher capacities; floppy disks are most often used for backup and transferring documents from one computer to another.

But, over the last few years, floppy disk capacity has improved. The IBM PC-AT, the highest capacity personal computer available from IBM until they introduced the new PS/2 line a few months ago, offered floppy disks with 1.2 megabytes (1,200 kilobytes) — more than three times the previous size and enough room to store about 250 of my articles.

And now, Kodak and others are

manufacturing disk drives with much higher capacities. And leading-edge PC firms, such as Pacific Micro Systems Inc. of Sausalito, Calif., are incorporating them in their products. One of the latest is Pacific Micro System's Pelican 6.6 drive, which after formatting provides a whopping 5.5 megabytes on a single floppy disk. For the first time, floppy disk capacity has begun to rival tape drives and other devices for backing up hard disk drives.

It costs \$895.

I obtained a unit for testing and compared it with one of the lowest-price backup products available, a \$179 program called FastBack, and one of the most reliable tape backup devices, the \$1,595 MaynStream 20.

Here are the results:

✓ FastBack, from Fifth Generation Systems of Baton Rouge, La., lets you back up data using your computer's built-in floppy disk

drive and ordinary floppy disks. Using one of my favorite PC-AT compatibles for testing, the Wells American A-Star, with 12.5 megabytes of my data on the hard disk, I proceeded to back up onto 1.2 megabyte floppies. It took 16 minutes of disk swapping and 11 floppies. It was klutzy, but it worked — great for people who only back up occasionally.

✓ The MaynStream 20 tape drive, from Maynard Electronics of Casselberry, Fla., is vastly easier to use, because it operates all by itself after you set it up. It only takes about four minutes to back up 12.5 megabytes onto a single audiocassette-size cartridge. Up to 20 megabytes fit on each cartridge.

✓ Finally, the Pelican drive was hooked up and the same test run. It took 22 minutes to back up the same amount of data, using three special \$20 floppy disks. It was necessary to hang around the machine in order to change the floppies every 7 or so minutes, so it wasn't quite "unattended." However, it was not at all as troublesome

to operate as the FastBack program, which required a disk change every 90 seconds.

Compared with the others, the Pelican device proved to be only fair for this type of backup. It had an annoying feature: it was noisy.

On the positive side, for people with less than 5.5 megabytes to backup on a regular basis, it's very easy to use. And it comes with a very powerful automatic backup program called Back-it.

I predict that it will be embraced as the perfect solution in some situations, but it won't become a mass-market product — mainly because of the trend toward smaller, handier, 3½-inch floppies that IBM incorporated in its latest machines. The Pelican drives are 5¼ inches in size, the same as the older floppies in the IBM PCs, XTs and ATs.

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